Varda’s Music
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Often referred to as the grandmother of the Nouvelle Vague, the French director Agnès Varda has produced a body of films over the last half-century that show prodigious inventiveness in their uses of images, sounds (especially the voice), and music. When she was already a highly recognized photographer (as the official photographer of the Théâtre National Populaire under Jean Vilar), Varda made her first film in 1954, the visually stunning La Pointe-Courte—predating by several years the first features of Truffaut, Godard, and the other main New Wave figures, she would become the most visible female cinéaste in what came to be called the New Wave. Her remarkable career has alternated fiction films and personal documentary; as distinct as they may be in mode, the fiction films feel like documentaries and vice versa. Her survival as an artist has benefited from her early establishment of her own production company, Ciné-Tamaris.

Varda’s longevity may be matched by some of her former New Wave colleagues—Godard, Marker, Resnais, Chatrol, and Rohmer are also still at work—but in recent years Varda in particular has tried her hand at a variety of new formats and genres. At the invitation of the French government, she created an installation in the Panthéon honoring “The Just,” the ordinary citizens who helped hide Jews from the Nazis during World War II. She has done other installation work, as well. In addition, under her exacting supervision, Ciné-Tamaris has released handsome DVD restorations of Jacques Demy’s and her own films, with generous quantities of extras. The DVD “boni” (Varda’s playful term) exemplify both the eighty-year-old’s embrace of new media and her impulse to elevate the DVD to the status of a new auteur medium.

This essay explores some major aspects of Varda’s uses of music. Varda is a mélomane, a music lover, who brings music into her films as part of her authorial vision. No single particular musical style marks her work, with the exception of the sound established in films scored by Joanna Bruzdowicz, beginning with Vagabond (1985) and extending more or less to 2003. An entire range of music and musical styles in Varda’s films occupy every niche from high modernism to pop and hip-hop. One need only think of the twelve-tone scores by Pierre Barbaud in La Pointe-Courte (1954), Les Créatures (1959), and 7 P., cuis, s. de b ... (À SAISIR) (7 yrs., kitchen, bath ... going fast, 1984) or, at the other extreme, the French rap, its poetry courtesy of the then seventy-two-year-old Varda herself, in The Gleaners and I (2000), or the feminist songs, also with lyrics by Varda, in One Sings, the Other Doesn’t (1977). In between, the listener can find the compelling scores of Michel Legrand in Cleo from 5 to 7 (1962) and of Georges Delerue for Varda’s earliest documentary, Du côté de la côte (1958) and her poetic film-essay about the Mouffetard market street in Paris, L’Opéra-Mouffe (1958).

Music is very often a structuring element in Varda’s filmmaking, but only rarely is it described as such by those who write about her work. Of course, few will ignore the uses of Mozart chamber music in Le Bonheur (Happiness, 1985), or the songs and performance scenes in One Sings, The Other Doesn’t and Jane B. by Agnès V. (1988). The scene of the song rehearsal in Cleo from 5 to 7 is famous for its reflexivity in showing the collaboration between the woman artist (director Varda / protagonist Cléo) and
her composer (Michel Legrand / Bob the songwriter, played by Legrand). But, starting with her very first film (*La Pointe-Courte*) and extending to her most recent work, the music in Varda's films demands attention and study.

She has experimented constantly with music in the laboratory of her films—and with nonmusic, too. In *Daguerreotypes* (1978), for example, musical silence certainly does not mean total silence. The sound effects become the score of the film: a barking dog, doorbells, creaking and shutting doors, half-heard gossip and chatting of women on the street, the brief sonic narrative of a passing motorcycle, window shutters opening and closing, footsteps on sidewalks, the clunks and clangs of a shopkeeper's kerosene canisters, cleavers chopping, and cash registers ringing. Without announcing itself as overtly as the compositions of sound in, say, Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) or in George Lucas's *THX 1138* (1971), this rhythmic and textured soundtrack constitutes a veritable musique concrète.

Since the 1980s, Varda has referred to the process by which she makes films as *cinécriture*, a word laden with cultural meaning that bears explanation. Roland Barthes and others in the 1970s emphasized the traces of the process of writing in using the word *écriture* (writing), and Varda, her cultural antenna ever open to trends and discourses, adapted the notion to film with an apt portmanteau word. Here I propose to outline a sketch of the subjective and objective uses of music in Varda's films, as a central element of her *cinécriture*.

The major part of this essay considers the relations between the score and the songs in Varda's two fiction masterpieces: *Cleo from 5 to 7* and *Vagabond* (*Sans toit ni loi*, 1985). These films, thematically speaking, are quite similar: the story of each focuses on a young woman destined to die and who is wandering in a delimited area—Paris in *Cleo* and the Gard region of southern France in *Vagabond*. It's also significant that each female protagonist loves music, and that music helps to structure and enrich each story.

I propose that the music—and more precisely the relationship between diegetic and non-diegetic music—plays a determining role in the elaboration of subjectivity in *Cleo from 5 to 7* and what we can call, by contrast, the objectivity of *Vagabond*.

*Cleo from 5 to 7*

*Cleo's* story follows a pop singer, Cléo (Corinne Marchand), who is anxiously awaiting results of a test for abdominal cancer. In the course of the film she consults a tarot reader, meets her maid-companion in a café, buys a hat, goes home for a work session with her songwriters, walks the streets and stops at a second café, meets up with a friend who works as a nude sculptors' model, delivers a film to the model's projectionist boyfriend and watches a short film through the projection-booth window, takes a solitary walk in a park and meets a sympathetic soldier at the end of his leave from the Algerian War, and takes the bus with him to the hospital where she receives her medical results. The film is demarcated by twelve chapter headings, each of which notes a character who's the narrational center for the segment, and the diegetic time notation (for example, Cléo from 17:05 to 17:08, Bob from 17:31 to 17:38). The film thus purports to be in "real time" and is famous for this. But, as the plot summary suggests, while the chapter titles suggest exactitude, there's hardly temporal verisimilitude: it's impossible to imagine Cléo getting all this done in two hours, let alone the ninety-odd minutes that the chapters' timings appear to cover (5:30 to 8:15 or 8:30).

In *Cleo from 5 to 7*, diegetic music and non-diegetic music are closely linked. With only two exceptions, the entire orchestral score derives from either of two diegetic songs: "La Belle P." (*The Beautiful P.*), or the "Cri d'amour" (*Cry of Love*). "La Belle P.," the mini-hit of blonde pop singer Cléo Victoire, dominates the first half of the film and represents the heroine's narcissistic side, her extroverted pop-star public personality. The other key song, the "Cri d'amour," is heard for the first time during the practice session with Cléo's songwriter Bob and her lyricist about halfway through the story. It's a song in minor mode, with somber and morbid lyrics. If "La Belle P." is a song affirming life, the "Cry of Love" might be a summons to death.
The very first music in the whole film is nondiegetic; let's call it Theme 1. It is heard immediately after Cléo visits the fortune-teller. The cue begins as Cléo is descending the staircase, and it continues as she walks in the street, its measured rhythm closely matching the accelerating and decelerating pace of her footsteps. In retrospect, we will learn that this theme is an orchestrated version of "La Bella P." But if we don't yet know what the cue refers to, why put it here? A more conventional scoring strategy might establish the theme's significance from the outset to enable moviegoers to understand fully and clearly the reference it is making. But Varda has other ideas for her score, which we'll return to presently.

What we shall now call Theme 2 is the "Cri d'amour," which is introduced diegetically in the scene of the rehearsal with the composer and the lyricist. Toward the end of their rehearsal session, Bob hands Cléo the music for this number and proposes she sing it as he accompanies her at the piano. The song differs markedly in mood from the coquettish, jazzy tunes they had been trying out. Slow and grave, it paints a picture of a desolate house, of the singer as dead in the future perfect tense: "Doors all ajar, with drafts running through / I am an empty house, without you, without you / And if you come too late, they will have buried me ... Alone, pale, and ashen, without you, without you."

Varda has characterized Cléo's performance here as the film's turning point, a notion that is dramatically evident in the rather astonishing progression that takes place as the number proceeds. Normal reality—the setting of the apartment, the composer and lyricist, the maid sitting nearby—sequees to another level entirely, the level of the unreal, as the camera moves, refocuses, and reframes, until what fills the screen is a black background and Cléo, in close-up, lit in artificial, theatrical style. What's more, she raises her eyes from the sheet music she was using to follow this song that she's never seen or heard before. Now that she looks at us, at the camera, as she sings her heart out, we feel that she already knows the music, she is the music, and that the music is issuing from inside the character.

Its morbid lyrics are entirely adequate to Cléo's obsessive fear of her illness. They even strike too close to the bone for her. After she sings the song, she rejects it and her songwriters. She throws off her blonde wig, a sign of her conventional femininity; she changes quickly into a simple black dress and stalks out of the apartment. And once she's in her courtyard on the way to the street, what should we hear but a few notes of the "Cri d'amour" as Theme 2 on the soundtrack—via the intermediary of a little boy who's banging on a toy piano? The rudimentary chords he's playing are none other than the harmonic basis of the "Cri d'amour." The strange effect, for any viewer who recognizes these chords as the echo of Cléo's song session in the scene just seen, is that the world answers to Cléo's thoughts, which find expression through music. The music that starts up again in the street can be heard and understood at two levels.
simultaneously: as nondiegetic music, and as metadiegetic music, "thought" by Cléo, a sort of emanation of this heroine who is, in the lyrics of the "Cri d'amour," pale, ashen, alone.

Figure 2. Cléo leaving her apartment; the boy in the courtyard.

In other words, the music cue, starting with the toy piano and segueing to an orchestral version, is subjective. Recall that all nondiegetic cues in the film appear only in the chapters that bear Cléo's name. Thus, the film establishes an equivalency between nondiegetic music and metadiegetic music.

Let us now return to the very first iteration of Theme 1, heard as Cléo leaves the fortune-teller's apartment: there was no diegetic introduction to this melody, and consequently we do not yet know that this music is coming to us from Cléo's consciousness while she is walking. It's as if Cléo is mentally humming her "Belle P." to reassure herself of her beauty and vitality—that the world she walks through becomes a mere backdrop for her musical thoughts. Of course, it's the camera that is primary in constituting this subjectivity by gliding along with Cléo through tracking shots centering and focusing on her and little else and thereby emphasizing the quasi-abstraction of her environment. At the same time, though, music is complicit in creating this subjective voice and this subjective eye.

As I have said, almost all the nondiegetic music cues in the film arise from the two songs, and reinforce the narrative and emotive point of view of Cléo. It is interesting that even the exceptions to this rule are tailored to evoke Cléo's subjectivity. During the scene where her lover José drops by, we hear a saccharine, romantic cue played by strings. If music can be oversweet, this is it; it matches the all-white decor of Cléo's apartment, her perfect bed, and white kittens. We can smell the perfume. The romance-magazine representation of Cléo's relationship with José (the camera moves smoothly around the couple in dreamy tracking shots while they exchange intimate nothings—no verse, yet) is thus reinforced by the music—a music imagined by the heroine who pictures herself as the perfect love object of her beau.

Another of the film's rare nondiegetic cues not related to Theme 1 or 2 occurs in a scene after Cléo and Dorothee leave Rauoif's projection booth in the movie house. Dorothee drops her hand mirror, which breaks on the pavement. A new chapter heading appears at that moment—a Cléo chapter—and immediately we hear a piercing cue for harp and harpsichord, which musically translates the superstitious
Cleo's fright in the face of this omen of death.

In the foreword to the published screenplay, Varda proposed a musical metaphor to explain her desire to make spectators feel the emotional fluctuations of time perception within strict clock time: "I want people to listen at the same time to the variations of the violin and the metronome ... inside of this mechanical time, Cleo experiences subjective time." Let's add that music represents both at once—a measured time, a metronome, and a channel to the affective, the violin, which belongs, along with editing and all the treatment of the image, to subjective duration.

**Vagabond**

*Vagabond* begins with the discovery of the lifeless body of a girl in a ditch; the rest of the film shows in retrospect how this body got there. Mona (Sandrine Bonnaire) is a rootless, disorderly hitchhiker without much of a past or future. She wanders through a small area of southern France in winter, sleeping in a tent in a cemetery, crashing in a small château with the male companion of the moment or in a filthy drugged-out squat in a provincial city. She tries but each time abandons work—in vineyards, with a goatherd and his family, at a garage. She spends an afternoon with a blind old woman, posing as her caretaker, and cheers her up with drink; she takes rides and food from a woman expert on plane trees and the disease that's killing them; she is raped in the woods; she falls in with street people. Through this episodic and often disconnected series of scenes, Varda refuses to construct Mona's "psychology." Instead, what we see is an uncompromisingly inefable portrait, through flashbacks and interviews by other witnesses/characters, of the failure of a life in an increasingly frozen landscape.

If *Vagabond* seems to be a film with almost no music, a film filled with silence and sobriety, this is not at all the case. The sole nondiegetic music in *Vagabond* is the musical material that accompanies each of the twelve famous long takes—leftward tracking shots that punctuate the narrative. Joanna Brunzowicz's music for string quartet is modern, rather neutral in dynamics, of an ambiguous tonality, melancholic. Though every passage that accompanies the tracking shots clearly derives from the same ur-quartet, each cue is unique; the score is shot through with correspondences and echoes of motifs among the twelve musical passages. In some iterations, the musical phrasing comes to a cadence of sorts, but just as frequently, a cue will simply stop, suspended in air, without musical resolution. Which calls to mind another great film about a young woman destined to die, who wanders: Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa vie.*

We can immediately tell one major difference between the formal device of the leftward tracking shots, accompanied by music, and the chapter rubrics in *Cleo* and *Vivre sa vie.* In *Vagabond,* the tracking shot does not demarcate an autonomous narrative unit. In a way, *Vagabond* deconstructs the strictly linear temporality of *Cleo* and *Vivre sa vie* by creating a sort of temporal puzzle or labyrinth. On the level of the music, as well as of the image, the end of a given tracking shot may be connected to the beginning of the next one several minutes after. For example, toward the end of the film, the camera comes to rest on a telephone booth at the end of tracking shot 11, and tracking shot 12, several minutes later, begins on another phone booth. But, more often still, it's rather a network of correspondences and relationships that is found among these tracking shots to link them: scattered through them are such motifs as blue shutters, rusted tractors, road signs, tree branches, stone walls, and grillwork fences. And, little by little, the tracking shots document the ineluctable process of deterioration in Mona, which will culminate where the film opened, on the body, lying in the ditch and covered with mud and grime. The music that accompanies the tracking shots seems not to follow any particular ordered progression (in the direction of increasing atonality, for example).

Brunzowicz and Varda assigned modernist music to Mona's wandering. This choice accords with the functioning of modern music in film just as Hanns Eisler had pictured it sixty years ago. In his essential essay *Composing for the Films,* Eisler condemns the use of traditional music in film because, in "a comfortable and polished euphony," drawing on long-established conventions that trigger instant clichéd reactions, it flattens or diminishes the power of the image. On the other hand, he writes, "The development of avant-garde music ... has opened up an inexhaustible reservoir of new resources and possibilities ... There is no objective reason why motion-picture music should not draw upon it."

Following in the footsteps of Eisler's own haunting score for Resnais's *Night and Fog,* and of so many other films, Varda's choice of ambiguous modern music escapes the romantic conventions and thus from tired automatism. *Vagabond*'s delicate score refuses the role of emotional illustration. The spare, stripped-down quality of the instrumentation has an effect not of reinforcing the feelings of Mona from the "inside," but rather it serves to comment on the character's isolation, the precariousness of her existence.
and the ever-colder countryside.

But there is another entire kind of music involved in Vagabond: the pop and rock songs, which are all diegetic. Like Cléo, Mona loves music (she says this to the tree expert, Madame Landier), and she listens to it often in the course of the film. The choice of what she listens to is hardly accidental.

Take as an example the scene where Mona plays a record on a jukebox in a bar. The tune in question is "À contre-courant" (Against the Grain), a 1983 song by the pop star Valérie Lagrange. The vagabond is listening to a song of a vagabond star: Valérie Lagrange left her top-of-the-charts fame in 1966 to live the communal life in India and Italy. This song with its reggae rhythm, superimposed onto the image of Mona the countercultural hitchhiker ("À contre-courant"), unites two stories of women rejecting dominant social values.

It often occurs in movies that a song on the soundtrack peels off from the narrative situation: its meaning departs from what occurs in the visual action. Valérie Lagrange's song is almost heroic in the antibourgeois politics it stakes out:

À contre-courant je sors de l'enfer (Against the current I emerge from hell)
Je vois la lumière, je marche à l'envers (I see the light, I walk backwards)
Je fais le contraire de ce que je vois faire (I do the opposite of what others do)
A contre-courant je vois au travers ... (Against the current I see right through ...)

... while in the image, we see Mona in closeup, in the bar, masticating a hunk of bread, her empty eyes most certainly not seeing "right through" anything. Thus, the song is at once sympathetic and ironic in its relationship to the image.¹⁰

In the château where Mona and her transient lover David are squatting, Mona listens to David's transistor radio; it's playing "The Changeling" by Jim Morrison and the Doors, dating from 1970, shortly before Morrison's death. The words depict a nomadic life: "I live uptown, I live downtown, I live all around." Note that the story told by the song's words, as well as the story of the rock star singing the song, go quite well with the story of Mona. In addition, Varda's choice of the Doors clearly evoked for her a whole other era of drugs and free love—an eventful time she experienced when she lived in Los Angeles. So the song amalgamates the personal story of the singing star, cultural associations, and the meaning of the lyrics applied to Mona, driving this marriage of music and image.

Vagabond derives a good deal of its organization, then, from two very different kinds of music. On one hand, there's the string quartet in twelve fragments. On the other, the periodic diegetic appearances of music indicate the indie-pop preferences of Mona: she fires up the jukebox, she listens to her companion's radio, she plays the radio at ear-splitting volume in Madame Landier's car to hear "Marcia Balto" by the marvelous indie French group Rika Mitsouko. Aside from alcohol and drugs, it is music that gives Mona the greatest pleasure and that in often complex ways cracks open a small window on her subjectivity.

Toward the end of her trajectory through the film and its desolate landscape, Mona, drugged and alone, is bothering the customers in the café bar at the Nîmes train station. She tries to play a song on the jukebox, but this time the employees in the bar prevent her from doing so and eject her from the café. It's a decisive moment, since the power of music has been taken away from her. The absence of music marks the end for Mona—as if subjectivity, pleasure, life itself cannot continue any longer.
The binary system of music in *Vagabond* brings to the fore an extreme contrast between diegetic and nondiegetic music: the string quartet emphatically does not belong to the heroine's subjective world, and there are the rock songs that give her a voice. Bruzdowicz's score acts like a narrative voice-over, complicit with Varda's personal voice that we hear at the beginning of the film and that disappears thereafter. This music is the nearest element to objective narration, whose status is more trustworthy than the testimonies of characters who are interviewed throughout the film.

By refusing any complicity with Mona, the nondiegetic music objectivizes the protagonist--it aids in creating the distance of which René Prédal writes, "Mona's introverted insolence blocks the traditional process of projection identification with the heroine."\(^{11}\)

**Le Bonheur**

This dialectical relationship of subjectivity and objectivity in which music plays a key role is also central, as I see it, to the functioning of *Le Bonheur*.

The tale of *Le Bonheur* stirred great controversy in 1965 and retains its power to provoke moral and aesthetic debate today. Protagonist François is a handsome, happily married carpenter living modestly with his wife Thérèse and two small children in the Paris environs. The family goes to the forest on weekends for blissful picnics. One day on a job in a neighboring community, François meets a pretty postal worker, Émilie. Soon they are a couple. François's marital happiness is supplemented by his happiness with Émilie. On a picnic, he guilelessly tells Thérèse about all this happiness, and she seems to understand. But when he awakens after a nap on the grass, Thérèse isn't there; she has drowned in the nearby lake. After a period of mourning, François and Émilie reconnect. As the film closes, we see François, the two children, and now Émilie enjoying an autumn afternoon en famille in the woods.

On which side is the Mozart chamber music that we hear everywhere in *Le Bonheur*? Does it express the thoughts and world of François, or does it express a more disenchanted and ironic narrating agency? The almost perfect ambiguity of *Le Bonheur* and the debates to which this film gave rise may well derive from the difficulty the audience has (whether consciously or not) in assigning the music to one "side" or the other.
Regarding her choice of Mozart\textsuperscript{12} to accompany this story of an artisan in the Parisian banlieue of the 1960s and his happiness that multiplies, Varda has said, "I was listening to Mozart and I was thinking about death which was at the center of things." Elsewhere she has commented, "His happy music wrenches the heart." Let us consider how it works in the film.

First let us suppose that the Mozart issues from, or expresses, François's consciousness. The music is heard when the film is presenting the image he has of his own life. On the evening after the first idyllic afternoon his family spends in the woods, his wife exclaims, "How magnificent the countryside is!" and the instant happiness of Mozart begins to play, like a reflex, to accompany the couple as they go to sleep in their conjugal bed.

But the worm in the apple of happiness threatens to rear its head in the middle of all this felicity, and the insistence of this music, repeated so often in the film, works to produce a doubling of meaning. A second outing to the forest is accompanied by the C-minor Fugue: yes, it's Mozart and it's pretty, but the particular performance of the piece—whether this was intended or not is unclear—is rather painfully laborious. We hear the fugue again during a sequence where Varda is showing Thérèse's daily chores—hands kneading bread dough, pouring water in a vase of flowers on the table, taking care of the children; something is discordant, for the music is trying to aestheticize the woman's work (the woman in isolation in the domestic sphere) whereas men's work, seen in the carpentry shop (socially, in a group), is accompanied by a different music—diegetic popular songs on the radio. If the Mozart expresses the world according to François, it's a world whose romanticism depends on the "natural" rights of men at the expense of women.

The particular performance and/or recording conditions of the clarinet quintet that Varda uses in Le Bonheur yield a hard quality that contradicts the intrinsic sweetness of the music itself. At the end of the movement, there is even a slight out-of-tune moment that reminds us of that lurking worm, which renders the anxiety that the filmmaker has mentioned. Is it a coincidence that the sunflower in the foreground in the opening credits sequence starts to wilt progressively before our eyes, accompanied by this perfect music that's performed so imperfectly? These few images summarize the entire story even before it begins.

At the end of Le Bonheur, is heard the fugue one final time, but with a difference: instead of the woodwind quintet, a small string orchestra plays it, now that the film has supplanted the living wife with Emille. The same music, but different; the same partner in love, but different. The structural play of several variables—oppositions such as woodwinds/strings, major/minor, fugue/allegro—produces an entire network of themes and variations that ultimately signify the interchangeability of the two women in the narrative. The film shows its hand: while François has an indestructible propensity to happiness, the film coolly suggests the monstrosity of his choices to live it out.

The use of Mozart's music situates the film between the subjectivity of the male protagonist and the discreetly devastating commentary of Varda. In the image of natural beauty and the impressionist color palette of the film, the music reflects the life of François as he conceives of it. At the very same time, though, the play of oppositions in the music, as well as the tendency toward disconcerting discord, reveal an ironing presence—the intelligence of the film and its auteur. The ambiguity that arises from these two perspectives produces the fascinating incongruity that has given life to the Le Bonheur controversy for over forty years.

Conclusion

What I have attempted to point out are the particular uses made of music in three of Varda's fiction films as it guides the audio-viewer to identify, or not, with fictional characters. Cleo from 5 to 7 explores the psyche of a woman terrified by illness and death; Michel Legrand's non-diegetic music extends diegetic songs into the scoring to place us on the side of the heroine's consciousness as she first tries valiantly to cling to her bouncy self-image (Theme 1) and subsequently faces the truth more squarely. Vagabond is an experiment of quite another kind, presenting a more impenetrable heroine, constructed, Rashomon-like, by varied and conflicting witness testimonials, which are all bound together by an ambiguous non-diegetic music that's objective rather than subjective. The debate over Le Bonheur may hinge on the very issue of whether to read its music as metadiegetic (subjective) or non-diegetic (objective), as an emanation of the hero or a commentary on him. This brief excursion into Varda's uses of music only begins to uncover the variety, richness, and subtlety of her cinéma-vérité as aided and abetted by music.

Endnotes

http://mni.press.uiuc.edu/1.3/gorbman.html
The opening ceremony was held January 18, 2007, on the solemn occasion of the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Varda's installation, comprised of videos on several screens and 300 photos, was held over because of its more than 30,000 visitors. Other installations: "Paiutopia," at the 2003 Venice Biennale, and "L'lle et elle," a one-woman show at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in 2006.


For the non-French speaker, a note about Varda's playfulness is in order, since this desire to play, to put things together in new ways, is an essential aspect of her creativity not adequately conveyed by subtitles. L'Opéra-Mouffe is a good example: it explores a certain market street in Paris, la rue Mouffetard, or, la Mouffe for short. Opéra-bouffe is a subgenre of nineteenth-century opera. Making a poetic film about the rue Mouffetard, with song included, Varda creates an apt condensation in opéra-Mouffe.

Both films are available on DVD in the United States from Criterion. A collection, 4 by Agnès Varda, was also released in 2008 by Criterion, which contains La Pointe-Courte, Le Bonheur (considered later in this article) and, again, Cleo and Vagabond. Varda's other films available in the United States are The Gleaners and I (Zeitgeist), The World of Jacques Demy (Fox Lorber), and A Hundred and One Nights (Winstar). She has reissued the majority of her films in France on DVD, including the essential Varda tous courts (Ciné-Tamaris), which contains her short films.

Two terms distinguish two types of music in narrative film according to their source in the story. Diegetic music is music whose apparent source is located in the world of the fiction—for example, the music issuing from a musician or a radio visible on screen. As for non-diegetic music, we hear it on the soundtrack, but the characters cannot or could not hear it. This is the case of orchestral scoring heard, say, in a Western.

My analysis of the music in Cleo from 5 to 7 appeared as "Cleo from 5 to 7: Music as Mirror," in Wide Angle 4, no. 4 (1981): 38–49.


Godard's 1962 film, whose full title is Vivre sa vie, film en douze tableaux (Living Her Life: A Film in 12 Tableaux) is contemporaneous with Cleo from 5 to 7; and like Cleo, it was scored by Michael Legrand.


However, the lyrics can also be understood as having the power of foreshadowing: a few lines later, they say, "Against the current, even until death... ."


The Mozart excerpts come from the Fugue in C minor K. 546, the Adagio in B-flat for woodwinds, and the Allegro of the clarinet quintet in A major K. 581.